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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [BG](#)  
SUBJECT: MILITARY AMBITIONS IN BANGLADESH

REF: A. DHAKA 505  
[1](#)B. DHAKA 476  
[1](#)C. DHAKA 411

Classified By: Ambassador Patricia A Butenis; reason 1.4(d)

[1](#)1. (U) COAS Presses Political Agenda: Chief of Army Staff Lt. Gen. Moeen Uddin Ahmed on April 2 renewed his populist attacks on Bangladeshi politicians and called for a "new brand of democracy." Moeen made the remarks in his keynote address to a regional conference hosted by the Bangladesh Political Science Association. Moeen's remarks built on themes in his Independence Day (March 26) remarks (Ref. A) and have further fueled speculation about the military's objectives under the interim Caretaker Government.

[1](#)2. (C) An Active Military: The military is playing an increasingly overt role as a key decision-maker behind the Caretaker Government.

-- Retired military leaders were appointed to prominent positions, at the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), the Election Commission, and to two of the advisor positions.

-- Plans for a new National Security Council with senior military representation are pending final approval by the Council of Advisors.

-- Retired and active military officers hold senior positions on the new National Coordination Committee, established to investigate corruption and criminal activity. (Ref C)

-- Moeen and other military leaders are exploring creation of a new political party with various military-vetted politicians. Rumors persist (denied by the ACC (Ref B)) that the military is leveraging threatened ACC corruption charges to garner participation in a military-backed political party.

-- Attempts to form a "king's party" dovetail with continued speculation that the military seeks a "government of national unity" to transition between the Caretaker Government and eventual parliamentary elections.

-- Moeen's reference to a "new brand of democracy" also suggests plans for fundamental constitutional changes to the structure of government in Bangladesh to create new checks and balances. Presumably, a military backed national unity government is believed necessary to bring about these changes.

-- The military's goals are ambitious and popular -- controlling corruption, enhancing the economy, restoring the rule of law, reforming the foundation of political parties;

they thus invite a continuous and expanding role for the military.

-- The military continues to put pressure on "the two ladies" to force them to leave Bangladesh permanently as the first step to ending the "dynastic" political parties that, incidentally, are in the best position to rally opposition to the military and the Caretaker Government.

13. (C) Tripwires and Actions: Although elections are unlikely before late fall 2008, we continue to press for an election roadmap and timeline. The government has suggested a timeline is possible after the Election Commission announces election reforms at the end of July. (See Septel on Ambassador's meeting with the Election Commission.) We will also continue to press the government on respect for human rights, transparency with regard to allegations of abuse, and the observance of due process in its legal proceedings against senior political figures and in corruption trials. Sham trials on insignificant charges used to sideline "undesirable" politicians and destroy the existing parties would significantly undermine the credibility of the government's anti-corruption drive. We will continue to support political party reform and thus press for an early end to limitations on political activity. Any political role for the military -- any version of a military government, to include Moeen as President -- would be a mistake. More broadly, we are encouraging an early lifting of the State of Emergency.

14. (C) Comment: The military has yet to overstep the constitutional limits of Bangladesh's unique Caretaker government system. The fig leaf of a "supporting role" subordinate to the civilian government though is shrinking as the military continues to insinuate itself and its proxies into civilian government and institutions. While we support the government's anti-corruption and political reform initiatives in principle, we are proceeding carefully, as our actions or inaction will inevitably be used by opponents and supporters alike to justify their positions. We therefore continue to press openly for an early and orderly return to a democratically elected government as the only effective institution for lasting political reform. We have direct lines to the military leadership and are communicating quite clearly our message. End Comment.  
BUTENIS